Chesapeake Climate Action Network

The problem: by the numbers

Climate: 80 percent of Virginia workers drive alone to work. Transportation accounts for more than 50% of Virginia's emissions as of 2019.

Economy: there are 570,000 jobs that should be served by fixed-route transit but are currently not. The average household in Virginia spends a quarter of their income on transportation.

Access: 1.1 million Virginians lack access to fixed-route service.

Structural issues

1) **Many bus stops are poorly placed and not well-connected to sidewalks.** This deters ridership for those with other options or forces riders into unsafe, unpleasant conditions.
2) **Basic transit infrastructure is inconsistent**. The availability of basic transit infrastructure — such as shelters, seating, and lighting — is inconsistent across Virginia. Key challenges include coordination with property owners, roadway design and space constraints, and current planning policies that dictate where infrastructure is placed based on ridership levels and proximity to development.
3) **Transit riders have limited opportunities to be a part of the decision-making process.** Guidance that ensures participation from and engagement with underrepresented and underserved communities is missing. Transit agencies of all sizes across the Commonwealth can consider forming rider advisory groups to help inform and advise local transit decision-making.
4) **There is strong interest in transitioning to zero-emission fleets across Virginia transit agencies.** Agencies require goals and policies to guide fleet electrification, guidance on how and where to equitably implement electrification, and strategies for incorporating higher-cost buses into the funding prioritization process.
5) **There is increasing interest in piloting zero-fare service to overcome barriers to transit access**.Roughly half of Virginia's transit agencies have expressed an interest in implementing zero-fare transit, and eleven agencies have already fully or partially implemented it.. It is not a one-size-fits-all solution — several other policies and strategies have been shown to provide equity benefits, such as the removal of transfer fees, increased frequency and coverage, or targeted subsidized fares.
6) **The availability of transit in Virginia is high, but gaps exist.** State funding formulas are not set up to support closing those gaps. State transit operating assistance currently incentivizes agencies to provide service that will gain the most ridership.
7) **There are unique needs for and barriers to adopting new and emerging technology among Virginia's transit agencies.** Virginia has made great strides in implementing emerging technology, specifically with autonomous vehicle testing, microtransit, and driver

assistance technology; however, there is much room for improvement and further expansion. Among Virginia's transit agencies, only 8% use contactless fare payment, 34% use real-time vehicle tracking, and 5% have implemented mobility-on-demand services.

8) **Transit is among the safest ways to travel, but there is room to improve both perceived and actual safety** for transit riders, operators, and employees. According to research by the American Public Transit Association, the chance of being involved in a crash decreases by more than 90% when taking public transit instead of driving, meaning that travel by transit is approximately 10 times safer than by automobile. Despite this, transit riders have several personal safety and crime concerns, most notably when traveling to and from or while waiting at transit stops.
9) **More data with better precision is needed to make informed decisions.** For the Commonwealth, DRPT, and local transit agencies to have accurate, up-to-date information, robust data must be produced, maintained, and tracked across all industry focus areas. If data is consistent, accurate, and reliable, it can support resource allocation and performance management.
10) **Equity and accessibility must be more heavily considered in guidance, requirements, and funding programs for transit agencies.** Some DRPT funding programs — such as the MERIT Capital and Operating Assistance Programs — focus primarily on cost efficiency and transit ridership. While important measures of transit success, these metrics alone can conflict with providing the most equitable service. Augmenting these funding considerations to include community outcomes has the potential to result in long-term equity benefits.

Recommendations

Near-term (1 - 3 years):

- *Accessibility*:
    - Develop resources to assist agencies with the evaluation of their fare collection policy and practices.
    - Provide transit agency staff, local decision-makers, and the public with information about tradeoffs, allowing them to make decisions that provide the greatest economic and societal benefits.
    - Develop suggested best practices for coordination between land use planning and transit planning.
- *Infrastructure adequacy:*
    - Develop technical guidance or policy on bus stop design elements and development.
    - Provide technical guidance or best practices for monitoring and reporting infrastructure performance.
    - Provide guidance or best practices for more effective stakeholder coordination when prioritizing improvements around bus stops.
    - Update MERIT – Capital Assistance scoring criteria to provide incentive for accessibility improvements to transit infrastructure.
- *Electrification:*

    - Establish statewide goals for zero emission transit vehicles and a transition plan to convert transit agency fleets.
    - Conduct recurring assessments of innovation in the zero-emission transit vehicle industry.
    - Develop implementation resources for agencies to assist with fleet transition planning.
- *Emerging technologies:*
    - Implement recurring assessments of technology use and plans across the Commonwealth.
    - Conduct recurring technology planning at the agency level.
- *Safety:*
    - Identify and share inclusive transit safety training opportunities for agency staff.
    - Research and compile best practices for transit agencies' involvement with local public safety.
    - Develop best practices for safety related roles to engage with community partners.
    - Provide guidance on (1) crime prevention through design and (2) rider safety and etiquette.
- *System engagement and governance:*
    - Develop a public engagement handbook that outlines expectations and guiding techniques for more inclusive public engagement at the local level.
    - Create rider advisory councils within local transit agencies statewide.

Mid-term (3 - 5 years):

- *Accessibility:*
    - Identify areas with unmet demand for transit service and provide new or enhanced service.
    - Allocate funding to prioritize expansion or enhancements of transit service to underserved areas and populations.
    - Develop qualitative and quantitative metrics to measure reliable and efficient transit service that promotes access to opportunity and lifeline services.
- *Emerging technology:* establish guidance for negotiating technology contracts.
- *Safety:* Pursue the completion of a study of safety measures that have worked to protect transit operators.
- *System engagement and governance:* Provide stronger public engagement guidance for local transit agencies within DRPT external guidance documents, such as Transit Development Plan (TDP) and Transit Strategic Plan (TSP) guidelines

Long-term (6+ years):

- *Infrastructure adequacy:* Develop statewide unconstrained funding needs list.
- *Electrification:* Align MERIT program funding with zero-emission goals.
- *Emerging technology:*
    - Expand opportunities for technology funding and implementation assistance.
    - Expand use of national or international data standards such as GTFS Realtime and GTFS-Flex.
- *Safety:* Share guidance regarding more inclusive performance measures (e.g., PTASP updates)